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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED  
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TAGS: [SF](#) [PGOV](#)  
SUBJECT: COMMUNIST PARTY ANNUAL CONGRESS MORE ABOUT  
POLITICAL THEATER THAN POLICIES

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Classified By: Political Counselor Walter N.S. Pflaumer for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

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Summary  
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1. (C) The South African Communist Party (SACP) held its second annual special congress on December 10 at the University of Limpopo-Turfloop campus in Polokwane. Lengthy speeches, predictable displays of solidarity with traditional allies such as China and Cuba, and pointed questions (without answers from senior leaders) dominated the event more than practical discussions about policy or what role the party has in the Jacob Zuma administration. Early enthusiasm from the roughly 800 delegates waned as the day wore on and as many of the more difficult questions about SACP positions were posed to the central committee without answers. Several senior African National Congress (ANC) National Executive Committee (NEC) members, all of whom have little in common with the communist wing of the alliance, attended the congress. The lack of any substantial debate or discussion over issues underscores how much this congress was about political theater. As the SACP struggles to figure out how to criticize an administration in which it enjoys more access than any previous government, its negative reception of ANC members such as youth leader Julius Malema and Billy Masetlha may seem like an easy way for SACP members to retain an appearance of independence while also taking on a role of greater political influence. The SACP may find it easier to deal with any ANC backlash from its treatment of Malema than to figure out how to maintain its place in the new order of South African politics. End Summary.

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An Animated, Then Sleepy Crowd of Delegates  
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2. (C) Polloffs attended the opening day of the SACP congress on December 10. The event took place at the University of Limpopo-Turfloop campus, the same venue as the watershed 2007 ANC party congress. Delegates began the day by singing and dancing to today's most popular political songs, "My Mother Was a Kitchen Girl" and "Bring Me My Machine Gun." The event began with remarks from SACP National Chairperson and ANC Secretary General Gwede Mantashe. Mantashe had trouble retaining order at several points early in the day's events, but finally quieted them down so he could outline the program for the conference. After doing this, the National Chairperson introduced the SACP's central committee to a

boisterous reaction and all of the guests to a mixed reaction (see below for details).

¶3. (SBU) Angola, Libya, and the United States were the only diplomatic missions represented. Communist parties from Brazil, China, Cuba, France, Greece, Portugal, and Zimbabwe also attended. Representatives from the Communist Party in China spoke for roughly five minutes in Chinese while a representative from the Cuban Communist Party followed, speaking for another five minutes. Delegates enthusiastically cheered the representatives from both parties -- particularly the two members of the Chinese Communist Party. Following the remarks from the Chinese representatives, Mantashe told the crowd that he and other ANC NEC members had been warmly received during a recent two-week "re-education camp" in China. All international guests departed before the first program break of the day. Qguests departed before the first program break of the day.

¶4. (U) After introductions, Mantashe turned the floor over to Secretary General Blade Nzimande who spoke for more than two hours about the SACP's political progress and place within the ruling tripartite alliance. Nzimande outlined the three major tasks for the congress. First, he said the party needed to develop an understanding of the current global economic crisis and South Africa's place within it. He said the second task was to address the "cruel irony" of why 15 years after democracy most South Africans live in a society in which the legacy of apartheid appears to be reproduced and expanded. He asked delegates to grapple with the fact that unemployment remains at 1994 levels and that the housing backlog remains the same as in 1994. Third, he said the party needed to make sense of the political changes in the country since the 2007 ANC party congress. Regarding the last point, Nzimande told the crowd that anti-communism is

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growing both in South Africa and worldwide. He noted, "It is important to bear in mind that it is not the ANC that is anti-communist but it has been different groupings and factions at different times both inside and outside the ANC that have sought to steer, with spectacular failures, the ANC towards an anti-communist stance."

¶5. (C) Nzimande said the SACP would "work together to do more" with the ANC, which was the ruling party's campaign slogan. He said the SACP wants to work with the ANC to build a working class hegemony in the state, in the economy, in the workplace, in communities, and in "ideological space." He vowed that in the next year the SACP would focus its efforts increasingly on the education front (Nzimande is the Minister of Higher Education) and on the health care front. He also promised that the SACP would work to ensure the ANC wins big in the 2011 local elections. Nzimande left the podium to huge applause and singing. Deputy Secretary General Jeremy Cronin took the stage next and announced that SACP's membership had grown to 96,049. (Note: These numbers probably are highly inflated. Most political analysts and former SACP members put the number at closer to 15,000. End Note.) Mantashe then closed the early sessions for a lunch break.

¶6. (SBU) The atmosphere following the lunch break was entirely different as nearly one-third of the crowd appeared to be sleeping when the later sessions began. The National Chairperson opened the floor to questions from the delegates who asked a range of questions for roughly three hours. Questions included why the SACP does not favor nationalization of the mines, why the SACP is not doing enough to organize at the local level, and why the party does not elect new leaders since many of the current ones are serving in the government. The central committee did not answer any of the questions, but Nzimande and Cronin took notes and some in the auditorium cheered individual speakers. After the time for questions, the delegates broke for dinner and that was the end of the first day of the congress.

(Note: Guests were only allowed to attend the first day of the congress. The rest of the event was closed to international visitors. End Note.)

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Why Them?  
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17. (C) The biggest mystery of the SACP's opening day was why certain ANC heavyweights attended. Tokyo Sexwale, Tony Yengeni, Billy Masetlha, and Julius Malema were all present, but none of them would be described as a friend of the Communist Party. In fact, it remains unclear whether these individuals were directed by the ANC to attend the congress or chose to attend to bolster their ties to the alliance's communist wing. Sexwale sat in the first row, flanked by the Libyan Ambassador to South Africa on one side and senior members of the Communist Party in China on the other. Sexwale is one of the country's wealthiest businessmen, and has been heavily criticized by the SACP in the past for not doing enough for the working class. He wore a black Giorgio Armani suit with the ANC logo sewn onto the jacket. Sexwale did not interact with any of the SACP delegates, but was approached several times by guests and SACP central committee members. Yengeni arrived with Malema, wearing a designer suit and a Manchester United cap. The former ANC Chief Whip Qsui and a Manchester United cap. The former ANC Chief Whip served in prison for fraud stemming from a court conviction under then National Director of Public Prosecutions Bulelani Ngcuka. He sat next to Malema throughout the early sessions of the congress and later sat next to Sexwale.

18. (C) Masetlha sat in a row by himself, dressed in a polo shirt and jeans. He was the only ANC guest to dance to some of the SACP's songs and later asked a question to the central committee about ways it could discuss the issue of nationalization. Masetlha several weeks ago slammed the SACP and Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) for inserting a "leftist agenda" into the Zuma government. He warned the SACP and COSATU to leave the ANC alone and let the ruling party govern per its mandate. Malema arrived late and sat in the second row after greeting Masetlha and Sexwale. The ANC Youth League firebrand wore designer jeans and a Ralph Lauren dress shirt. He sat next to Yengeni and later sat next to Sexwale. (Note: It was interesting to note that Floyd Shivambu, ANC Youth League spokesperson and close

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Malema ally, sat with Young Communist League members and did not interact at all with Malema. He even asked a public question and identified himself as a member of the Young Communist League. End Note.) The SACP has been extremely critical of Malema for his public dispute with Cronin. (FYI: Malema called Cronin a "white messiah" for his repudiation of Malema's call for nationalization of the mines. End FYI.)

19. (C) Malema's presence caused considerable controversy on the opening day and in following days. During Mantashe's introductions of central committee members and guests, SACP delegates booed Masetlha and then booed Malema. The youth leader looked stunned that the crowd responded to him so negatively. What happened next has caused considerable conjecture and speculation in the media, which did not have a large presence at the event. (Note: Poloffs did not see any accredited journalists inside the auditorium. End Note.) At the end of the early sessions, press reports say Malema reportedly went to Mantashe and asked for a chance to address delegates. Mantashe denied the request. Malema returned to the later sessions after the lunch break and sat next to Sexwale. When the SACP national chairperson opened the floor to questions from the delegates, many of the questions concerned the question of nationalization. After the second question on nationalization, Poloffs saw Sexwale tap Malema on the shoulder and the youth leader left the auditorium largely unnoticed. Malema then addressed e-TV journalists outside the auditorium and told them he was humiliated and

denied a chance to speak. In the days following the congress, the rancor between the ANC Youth League and the SACP has grown. The SACP called Malema a "drama queen" and Malema is reported to have sent Cronin an angry text message warning "wait until you see what is coming in your direction." Zuma addressed the SACP in a closed session on December 12 and told delegates that infighting and name-calling would not be tolerated by the party's leadership.

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Comment  
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¶10. (C) Long speeches, displays of solidarity, and pointed questions have long been staples of SACP events. We are not surprised that Nzimande spoke for two hours, that communist parties from China and Cuba addressed the crowd to large applause, or that delegates asked difficult questions to the central committee. The continuity of such traditions is clearly important to SACP members and political theater counts for a lot with the party. However, this comfort in old traditions masks the fact that the party in many ways is having difficulty maintaining the appearance of independence while having many senior figures within the Zuma government at the same time. The lack of any substantial debate or discussion over issues underscores that the SACP has yet to figure out how to criticize an administration in which its members hold such prominent roles. It was lost on no one in the auditorium that several central committee members -- Blade Nzimande, Jeremy Cronin, Rob Davies, Yunus Carrim, and Gwede Mantashe -- are now working inside the halls of government or ANC headquarters. Perhaps some in the SACP judge that booing Malema and Masetlha is an easy way for SACP members to square this circle. This, however, could turn out to be a dangerous game that could alienate the party from the ANC leadership. Ultimately, it will be far easier for the SACP to deal with any ANC backlash from its treatment of Malema than it will be for the party to figure out -- and maintain -- its place in the new order of South African politics. End Comment.  
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